

MARCH AND RALLY AGAINST SEX TRAFFICKING DRAWS CONCERNED PUBLIC **By Kathleen Piché, L.C.S.W., Public Affairs Director**



Thousands of concerned citizens and community members joined Los Angeles County Board Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Second District, Los Angeles City Mayor Eric Garcetti, and District Attorney of Los Angeles County, Jackie Lacey, in protesting the growing problem of child sex-trafficking on Saturday, April 26th, 2014.

Sponsored by LA City, County and the Empowerment Congress, the rally brought LA County agencies, Community Based Organizations and the public together to bring awareness to growing concerns about children falling into prostitution and sex slavery. The average age of a victim entering prostitution is 12.



As part of the task force, LACDMH staff was there to provide solidarity and support. Pictured from left to right are Gail Blesi, Ph.D., Quality Assurance Manager, Juvenile

Justice Mental Health Program; Sermed Alkass, Psy.D., TAY Admin Programs; Erica Reynoso, Ph.D., CSEC Initiative Lead, Juvenile Justice Mental Health Program; and Doralee Bridges, Community Service Counselor, Transition Age Youth Program.

Problem

- Recent statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) estimate that 100,000 children are sold for sex each year within the United States. Hundreds of cases of exploited children go unreported.
- It is further estimated that 300,000 U.S. children are at risk for becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation.
- Many victims of sex trafficking have been molested, raped, and sexually assaulted by a family member or close family friend — 95% of “teen prostitutes” were victims of earlier childhood sexual abuse. (<http://www.prevent-abuse-now.com/stats>)

On September 24, 2013, a Board motion, introduced by Supervisors Ridley-Thomas and Knabe, was approved to establish a county-wide multi-agency response model to combat the sex trafficking of children in Los Angeles. The Sex Trafficking Task Force and the Departments of Probation, Children and Family Services (DCFS), Public Social Services (DPSS), Mental Health (DMH), Public Health (DPH), Health Services (DHS) and Sheriff are working together to create a model and implementation plan for victims of sex trafficking.

